

James Tertius de Kay. *Roosevelt's Navy: The Education of a Warrior President*. New York: Pegasus Books, 2012. 352pp. ISBN 978-1-60598-409-4 (Paperback). Price £10.00.

James Tertius de Kay's effort with *Roosevelt's Navy: The Education of a Warrior President* has produced a mixed result that ranges from disappointment with the style and format to approval for its content and argument. The author of several books on historical figures written for young readers, de Kay's manner of presenting this history resembles the young adult genre. The chapters are short, some three pages long, and the content is written in the simple language of youth. Complex ideas, to include illicit relationships between adults, are presented with no hint of sophistication. Additionally, simple cause and effect events are presented, absent without nuance. One comes away with the sense that you are reading an instalment of a 'young heroes' series of books, and that is disappointing because some of the content is actually quite interesting and insightful despite the fact that no primary sources are used aside from Roosevelt's personal letters.

The Roosevelt in question is Franklin D. Roosevelt, which might raise some surprise amongst naval history enthusiasts who tend to hold Franklin's distant cousin by blood and uncle by marriage, Theodore Roosevelt, in the highest regard. T.R. had written his first book, *The Naval Way of 1812*, while still in college and then had gone on to be a major naval strategist throughout the remainder of his life. Franklin D. Roosevelt, despite his reputation as Commander in Chief during World War II, had always been portrayed as a pretender within the naval realm, more interested in looking like Theodore Roosevelt than being like Theodore Roosevelt. *Roosevelt's Navy* attempts to alter this historic perception, and does an able job of it. Through a series of short examinations of significant events in FDR's early career are indicative of the momentous events that would follow during his presidency, de Kay leaves more than a passing impression in the reader's mind that FDR remained a work in progress throughout his life, moving inexorably towards greatness.

Beginning with an exploration of Franklin Roosevelt's privileged youth, filled with books about the Navy and sailing on large sloops, and then progressing through young adulthood with him increasingly fixated on his successful distant cousin Theodore, FDR emerges as a shallow individual betraying only brief glimpses of the depth of strategic acumen that would characterize his later career. The first clear appearance of the later Roosevelt coincides with his 'principled' stand as a young New York state senator against the corruption of Tammany Hall. The author reveals that there is more than a hint of strategic calculation in Roosevelt's actions that suggested his future dealings with political opponents during the Great Depression. This method, a short analysis of a small event early in Roosevelt's career with a

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foreshadowing of future actions, continues throughout the book, delivered without varnish.

Of course the focus of the books centres on Roosevelt's eight years as Assistant Secretary of the Navy during Woodrow Wilson's presidency, encompassing the years preceding and during the First World War. It is important to note that the second Roosevelt served four times as long as his illustrious cousin, and emerges as much more successful during his tenure. Whereas Theodore Roosevelt would use brute force to make things happen as Assistant Secretary, Franklin took a more balanced approach, alternating between working within the bureaucracy and taking it on directly and forcefully. Franklin argued strenuously with President Wilson and his Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels to increase the size of the Navy and raise its readiness to no avail in the years prior to the war, but once war was on the nation's threshold he threw himself into the effort, ranging up and down the eastern seaboard as well as traveling overseas to create and inspect shipyards. His unusual success and increased public persona ultimately led to his nomination as a vice-presidential candidate, which was unsuccessful, but this paved the way for his ultimate election as governor of the state of New York.

De Kay's Franklin Roosevelt is a fascinating character, though two-dimensional. But perhaps this was more a result of the subject rather than the author. This is a Franklin Roosevelt who was still in his physical prime, before the onset of polio deepened him as a man and a leader.

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